

FAILED MARINE CORPS COMMANDANT AMOS CALLS FOR CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILED LEADERSHIP (FOR OTHERS)



Marine Corps Commandant James Amos has rediscovered the concept of consequences for failed leadership. Will he also face consequences?

I have long maintained that part of the reason why Afghanistan has been such a doomed mission is that high ranking military figures have faced zero consequences for their failed leadership. As just one example, John Allen faced no punishment when he offered the insane excuse that the rash of green on blue killings in August of 2012 was due to Ramadan fasting, even when it was widely known that clashing cultural values and the mere presence of Americans were the driving forces of the attacks. Allen did wind up retiring in disgrace, but only because he got caught up in the periphery of the party sniffing surrounding the David Petraeus-Paula

Broadwell affair. Until that point, Allen was scheduled to fail upward to NATO Commander.

That background makes last night's announcement that two Marine Corps generals will be forced into retirement over their failures that led to the devastating attack on Camp Bastion last September a huge surprise. From the New York Times:

Maj. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, formerly NATO's regional commander in southwestern Afghanistan, was faulted for failing to properly assess risks posed by the insurgency operating outside the vast military base in Helmand Province that included camps Bastion, Leatherneck and Shorabak.

General Gurganus had been nominated for his third star and a senior leadership role at the Marine Corps headquarters at the Pentagon, but will retire instead.

Maj. Gen. Gregg A. Sturdevant, the former commander of the Third Marine Aircraft Wing forces assigned to Afghanistan, was faulted for not having established an integrated system of security at Bastion airfield, and will also take early retirement.

Of course, a cynic might note that such severe consequences don't seem to have been leveled due major loss of life, but was more likely tied to the loss of \$200 million worth of aircraft and major damage to facilities at the base as well. There was also a huge chance for even bigger embarrassment from the attack, as McClatchy reminds us that the attack may have been aimed at Prince Harry, who was at the base at the time of the attack which hit just about two hours before his birthday.

Returning to the Times, we have this from Amos:

Gen. James F. Amos, the Marine Corps commandant, announced the disciplinary

action on Monday. He said the punishments were unprecedented in modern Marine Corps history and were an effort “to remain true to the timeless axioms relating to command responsibility and accountability.”

Hmm. Amos is telling us about “command responsibility and accountability”. I wonder if he feels that those concepts apply to him, as well? Amos has been at the center of not one, but two scandals in which he has been accused of applying undue command influence regarding criminal proceedings inside the military.

First, there are his comments on the prosecution of sexual assault cases. While it is laudable that Amos wants to see sexual assaults prosecuted fully, the way he has gone about it has actually made such prosecutions harder to carry out. From McClatchy:

The Marine Corps commandant wanted to snuff out rape in the ranks. However, his well-meaning but overly blunt talk instead complicated Marine sexual-assault cases worldwide and raised troubling questions about whether accused Marines will get a fair shake.

This week, for the second time in recent months, a Marine Corps trial judge found that Gen. James F. Amos’ forceful remarks on sexual assault earlier this year presented the appearance of unlawful command influence.

And just what did Amos say to cause the problems? Try this:

Amos used his tour to stress his own strong feelings about the 348 reported sexual assaults in the Marine Corps last year. In a roughly 75-minute talk intended for every Marine non-commissioned officer and officer, the career aviator demanded tougher

punishment for those accused of sexual misconduct.

“Why have we become so soft?” Amos asked in a speech April 19 at Parris Island.

He further described himself as “very, very disappointed” in court-martial boards that don’t expel those who misbehave sexually, and he denounced as “bullshit” claims that many sexual assault allegations amount to second thoughts from individuals who initially consented.

“I know fact from fiction,” Amos declared, a transcript of his April 19 speech shows. “The fact of the matter is 80 percent of those are legitimate sexual assaults.”

Put another way, the Marine Corps’ top officer was telling his subordinates that 80 percent of those charged with sexual assault were guilty. He was demanding dismissals from the service, and suggesting that an alleged victim might be simply suffering from, as he phrased it, “buyer’s remorse.”

But the sexual assault cases aren’t the only front where Amos has appointed himself as judge and jury. The high profile case in which soldiers were seen on video urinating on the corpses of insurgents they had killed certainly called for aggressive prosecution. But Amos clearly crossed the line again in how he went about calling for prosecutions:

The Marine Corps dropped the criminal charges filed against the only officer implicated in the video depicting Marines urinating on dead insurgents in Afghanistan, but he will still face possible involuntary separation from the service.

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Clement's defense team had been preparing for a court-martial scheduled in November, and maintained that he did nothing wrong that day. They expected to hear testimony on Sept. 11 at Camp Lejeune, N.C., from Col. Jesse Gruter and Maj. James Weirick, two Marine staff judge advocates who have raised repeated concerns about unlawful command influence by senior officials at Marine Corps headquarters in all of the urination cases.

Weirick filed an explosive inspector general complaint in March that accused Commandant Gen. Jim Amos, or others acting on his behalf, of deliberating and unlawfully seeking to exert influence on the cases of Clement and the seven other Marines who faced disciplinary action following the investigation. Weirick, acting as a whistle-blower, also alleged that senior Marine officials sought to cover up their involvement in the cases.

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The Corps' controversial handling of the legal cases has generated interest in the national media, on Capitol Hill and across the Corps. Clement's lawyers filed a motion in July to dismiss his case on the grounds of unlawful influence. The motion included a signed declaration from Lt. Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, who acknowledged that he was removed as the consolidated disposition authority overseeing all the legal cases after he had a disagreement with the commandant over how much punishment was warranted. The commandant told Waldhauser he wanted all of the Marines involved "crushed," the three-star general's declaration states.

Hmmm. A Marine Corps Commandant who appoints

himself as judge and jury in multiple cases while even removing prosecutors with whom he disagrees might be in line for facing some “responsibility and accountability” of his own. I won’t hold my breath waiting for it to happen, though.